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Public Affairs, Roger Williams University

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Students Venture to the Dominican Republic for Scholarship, Service

Faculty-led study abroad trip focuses on public health and social justice via community immersion and volunteer opportunities with the Foundation for International Medical Relief of Children



Staff from the Punta Cana Ecological Foundation lead RWU students on a community visit to Veron in the Dominican Republic to showcase their innovative techniques for sanitation and sustainability.

January 7, 2016 | Public Affairs Staff

RESTAURACION, Dominican Republic – Fresh off of finals (and a brief holiday break), students from Roger Williams University headed to Hispaniola – the Caribbean island home to Haiti and the Dominican Republic – on Jan. 2 to undertake a two-week study abroad session in which they will live with local families and learn how the island’s history has shaped its current political, social and economic climate. Students will also explore the island’s healthcare infrastructure, learn about health issues specific to the region and how care is delivered at local hospitals and clinics, with a particular focus on the Dominican Republic.

Assistant Professor of History Autumn Quezada-Grant and Associate Professor of Biology Kerri Warren spearheaded the trip, which Quezada-Grant describes as an opportunity for students to confront social inequities and economic disparities that plague the island nation – where mere miles separate luxury beach resorts from impoverished neighborhoods lacking clean water and electricity.

“We want our students to become much more aware of social inequality and racial inequality and understand the problems that are created when communities do not have access to basic government services such as electricity, water, healthcare and education,” Quezada-Grant says. “The Dominican Republic is a developing country that cannot solve these problems of limited access to water and other needs without understanding their root causes. We want the students to think through that dynamic and learn about the process of how countries develop.”

For the RWU cohort, it also means getting involved with the issues – not just observing them. While there, the group will partner with two FIMRC (Foundation for International Medical Relief for Children) clinics in Restauración and Tilori, volunteering in the health center and the school. The students each brought a suitcase of supplies including school, personal care, medical and athletic items. They also purchased tutorial books to help local children learn English during their time in the community.

Roger Williams University has a longstanding relationship with FIMRC, deploying student volunteers from across the disciplines to sites in Central and South America annually. The University’s FIMRC chapter is one of the largest and most active organizations on campus, organizing the annual trips during winter and spring breaks to deliver supplies and provide community health outreach programs along with basic medical care services.



“We are working so hard to make a change every time we go, and then bring that change and what we’ve learned back to Roger Williams” says senior psychology major Kelsey Harrington, who serves as vice president for the RWU chapter.

The students return on Jan. 16. You can follow their journey and personal experiences, which they are live blogging, [here](#).